



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index

Senior libero Whitney Boehler digs a ball during a practice this week. Boehler led the 'Dogs in digs last season. The team opens play tomorrow.

# 'Dogs open season with four weekend matches

BY BRENT FOSTER  
Staff Reporter

The volleyball team begins its season this weekend in familiar territory: playing against some of the top teams in the country.

Truman kicks off its schedule tomorrow afternoon at the Missouri University of Science and Technology Middle of Everywhere Classic in Rolla against the University of Missouri-Saint Louis. After UMSL, the 'Dogs face No. 6 Grand Valley State University (Mich.), which is likely to be the first of many tests this season for the 'Dogs.

"It will be good competition, as usual, but it'll be a little bit more balanced," head coach Jason Skoch said. "We aren't going to be playing four ranked teams, which is good because I still don't know who we are going to play yet as far as our personnel."

Former Washburn University assistant and first-year UMSL head coach Trent Jones said he is looking forward to the challenge of playing in a tournament against teams like Truman.

"It's a great team," Jones said. "Jason and Ben [Briney, the assistant coach] do a great job, and they are definitely one of the teams to look out for this season. They should compete for not only a conference championship but a national championship. It's going to be a great test to see where UMSL's at after we play them."

Grand Valley State returns four

starters from last season's 33-4 Elite Eight squad. They are the preseason favorite to repeat as champions of the Great Lakes Conference. Grand Valley, like Truman, is no stranger to success, having won the national championship in 2005.

The matches don't get easier for the Bulldogs on Saturday as they face the University of North Alabama, a team still on the minds of Bulldog upperclassmen. In 2006, UNA knocked the Bulldogs out of the NCAA Tournament in the second round on its way to the national championship game. The loss to UNA ended Truman's 36-match win streak and the 'Dogs' national title hopes. UNA missed the NCAA Tournament for the first time in 12 years last season but returns four starters from last season's squad.

The Bulldogs close out the tournament Saturday night against host school Missouri S&T. The Miners are playing just their second season of volleyball. The 'Dogs defeated Missouri S&T 3-0 last season in the regular season finale.

The Bulldogs also will get a chance at the classic to see two MIAA rivals, Pittsburg State University and Missouri Western State University, but will not compete against them.

Truman is 11-1 in its last 12 season openers, and senior middle blocker Allie Cherven said she expects more of the same this weekend as the team finishes up its final preparations.

"We expect to win this weekend," Cherven said. "All through practice coach has been pushing us about making less errors because there's 25 only points now instead of 30. ... The only thing we are still trying to work on is a second setter."

Even with so many players returning, Skoch said there could be some changes in the lineup this weekend, adding that freshman setter Kylie Eason should see some playing time.

"There will be some surprises," Skoch said. "We are going to have two freshmen playing. We may try five and one with only Ashley [Petak] setting. Kylie, our freshman, has been really good. She's going to get a lot of playing time, but we may try keeping one of our right sides in like we did in '05 and '06. ... We are toying with some stuff right now."

Skoch also said he wants to see someone rise up and take over the outside hitter position during play this weekend.

"I just want to see who asserts themselves as the leaders on this team," Skoch said. "We are playing good now, just no one has stepped up and taken hold and said I want to be the outside hitter. No one's playing like that. No one's sitting there and saying the right side is mine. So at the end of the tournament I want to feel like we make some headway as far as who our eight players are going to be."

# NCAA changes multiple volleyball rules

Sets now played to 25 points, same as international rules

BY BRENT FOSTER  
Staff Reporter

Even with six returning seniors, there will be plenty of changes on the volleyball court this season for the Bulldogs.

Multiple rule changes have been implemented for the 2008 season, including a change in the number of points needed to win a set — from 30 to 25.

"I hate the rule change, but we aren't one of the big sports," head coach Jason Skoch said. "The change is ridiculous. The [NCAA]

wouldn't have done something this dramatic to one of the big sports when the majority of the coaches voted against it. ... I feel like they would have given another sport respect and said, 'OK we are going to start in '09 and give you a chance to really think it through.'"

Skoch said the coaches filed an appeal through the coaches' association but that the appeal was not able to delay the onset of the new rules.

Contests played to 30 points demonstrated a decrease in intensity in the middle of those sets, according to the NCAA Rules Committee. The Rules Committee also said an increase in focus and fan excitement is the main drive behind the new rules.

Skoch said the NCAA's strategy is to create fewer sweeps and thus make matches more competitive. Last season the Bulldogs swept 19 matches. Skoch said that if anything, the rule change hurts the better team and gives an advantage to the underdog.

"Their rationale doesn't make sense," Skoch said. "They want to reward the bad team, in my mind. They say this will lesson the 3-0 sweep. ... I don't know of any other sport that would do that. Let's change the rule to make the good teams have a better chance of losing."

Despite all the negatives, Skoch said he thinks there is a possibility the changes could help team this season.

"We're scrappy, and so we can really push hard so it could help us," Skoch said. "But overall I don't like it."

The change also makes the NCAA and international scoring the same, one reason why Div. I coaches largely supported the rule change. The change will affect all three NCAA Divisions and the NAIA.

Not every MIAA coach agreed with Skoch's view of the rule change.

"I think the game will be more competitive," Emporia State University head coach Bing Xu said. "It's good for the players because they need to know when they step on the court to be ready right away."

Junior libero Whitney Boehler said the rule change shouldn't bother the Bulldogs this season.

"It's not that weird because we always played that way in high school," Boehler said. "It's just a faster game, and I like that because it takes away the chances for people to come back."

Another rule change this season will limit the number of substitutions per match from 15 to 12. The drop in subs is supposed to coincide with fewer points being played.

"They did that to balance the drop in points," Skoch said. "I would have only dropped it two subs, but they dropped it three. ... They figure each sub was worth so

many points, three or four, so they rationalize this. They say it keeps the balance."

The term "game" also was dropped and now will be known as a "set."

Skoch said the rule changes were done without any type of planning or research.

"They did no study," Skoch said. "They did nothing. This is based off of opinion. When I brought to the head of the rules committee the fact about budgets and how we spend thousands of dollars on a charter bus to drive eight hours, they did not do any studies. It's just not smart. We want to develop volleyball players. Now we are going to drive eight hours and play a game [in] under an hour."

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